**Autism Spectrum Disorder in Young Children**

Autism Spectrum Disorder varies widely in severity and symptoms and may go unrecognized, especially in mildly affected children or when it is masked by more debilitating handicaps. Very early indicators that require evaluation by an expert include:

* Not babbling or pointing by age 1
* No single words by 16 months or two-word phrases by age 2
* Not responding to name
* The loss of language or social skills
* Poor eye contact
* Not asking for things in the same way as other children do (using language in a functional manner)
* Failure to show objects to others
* Inappropriate play eg. child may continuously spin the wheels of a toy car rather than push it
* Excessive lining up of toys or objects
* No smiling or social responsiveness.
* May not use pointing to direct another person's attention
* Walking on toes
* Hand flapping

Later indicators include:

* impaired ability to make friends with peers
* impaired ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others
* absence or impairment of imaginative and social play
* stereotyped, repetitive, or unusual use of language
* restricted patterns of interest that are abnormal in intensity or focus
* preoccupation with certain objects or subjects
* inflexible adherence to specific routines or rituals

**Some behaviors that are usually deemed as ‘negative’ may be seen in children with autism. These behaviors may seem to be very intentional but can actually be the result of sensory processing problems or characteristics of autism spectrum disorder. Examples include:**

* Breaking or handling objects and pets too roughly or throwing items/objects
* Failure to orient to one's name being called (often mistaken as ‘not listening’)
* Becoming very upset at transitions or at having to wait
* Being rigid about things being ‘the same’ as they were previously (ex. Sitting in the same seat every time)
* Preferring to engage in play with certain materials or in certain centers over and over again, resists teacher’s efforts to have him/her try something new
* Becoming upset if things are not done ‘a certain way’
* Bumping into or putting his/her hands on other children
* Refusal to participate in activities because it is too loud, too many people, smells, etc
* Seeming to have a ‘tantrum’ over something small ( a decreased ability to self-regulate)
* Refusal to eat certain foods